



In Retrospect: AARP Likes Ike, Not Taft

In the July-August 2013 issue of the *AARP Bulletin*, the periodical's editor in chief, Jim Toedtman, wrote an editorial headlined "[All Together, Let's Like Ike.](#)" The headline was, of course, a play on the campaign slogan coined for General Dwight D. Eisenhower in 1951, when internationalists dismayed by the prospect of popular Ohio Senator Robert A. Taft (a non-interventionist in foreign policy) securing the Republican nomination in 1952 started a movement to convince Eisenhower — a lifelong Democrat — to run for president as a Republican.



Toedtman began his editorial by noting, reflectively, that while growing up in Ohio, "we" idolized Robert Taft, "our U.S. senator for 14 years and long known as 'Mr. Republican' for his party loyalty and his conservative, small-government principles." Taking Toedtman to be using the editorial "we," referring to himself, we took a look at his biography and saw that he graduated from Berea (Ohio) High School in 1959, making him a mere lad of about 11 years old at the time of the 1952 presidential campaign. While this writer also took a strong interest in politics around the same age, if Toedtman was able to identify "conservative, small-government principles" at 11, he must have been a political prodigy, indeed!

Perhaps he was merely echoing the sentiments of older family members, but he notes that "we were angry when Dwight D. Eisenhower defeated Taft's bid for the Republican presidential nomination in 1952 and was twice elected president." Constitutionalists would applaud his astute discernment of the relative merits of Taft and Eisenhower, but the apparently older and wiser Toedtman instead expresses his regrets: "History shows we were wrong."

Toedtman does not explain why he and his associates were "angry" (rather than merely "disappointed") when Eisenhower knocked Taft out of the race, but many who wrote about the methodology used to hand the nomination to Eisenhower were also angry — and justifiably so. First came a campaign to reduce the public's confidence in Taft as a viable GOP candidate, through the creation of a slogan similar to that used to propel Eisenhower's run: "I like Taft — but he can't win."

In his article "Robert Taft: The Man Who Should Have Been President" in *American Opinion* magazine (a predecessor of *The New American*) for October 1972, the renowned poet and essayist E. Merrill Root noted:

Senator Robert A. Taft was Mr. Republican — and Mr. American. It seemed as if, at last, we might behold the outward and visible sign of an inward and invisible grace — that the collectivists and Marxists might be defeated, that the Insiders of the Establishment might be exposed and stopped. "It might have been!"

But the power of the Insiders and the malignancy of the Establishment were not stopped. By chicanery, by political skullduggery, by false slogans like "Taft can't win," by inflated ballyhoo of a Cheshire political general, by brazen stealing of whole delegations, by iron financial pressures



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exerted by the Eastern crowd, Robert Taft was made the victim of political thugs, and the Politician (who was not even a Republican) was chosen. Thence death into our world, and all our woe! But — “It might have been!”

Root’s reference to Taft’s opponents engaging in “brazen stealing of whole delegations” is an eery foreshadowing of some of the same techniques used against Rep. Ron Paul during the 2012 Republican primary season. In both cases, the “internationalist” wing of the GOP felt compelled to stop any candidate who threatened their interventionist foreign policy and their loose interpretation of the Constitution.

The convention victory of Eisenhower over Taft to become the 1952 Republican presidential nominee marked the near-permanent takeover of the party by [neoconservatives](#) and the ouster of constitutionalists, sometimes referred to as [paleoconservatives](#).

Except for the brief resurrection of constitutional conservatism in 1964, with the nomination of Barry Goldwater as its presidential candidate (much to the chagrin of the neoconservative, “Rockefeller wing” of the party) the Republican Party would remain firmly in neo-con hands ever after.

Retuning to Toedtman’s explanation of why he now believes he was wrong to have preferred Taft, whom he identified as a man of “conservative, small-government principles,” are we to presume he no longer values such principles? Or does he believe that Eisenhower, as president, exemplified those principles better than Taft might have?

In laying out his paeon to Ike’s accomplishments, Toedtman notes that Eisenhower “found a way to persuade the public and Democrats in Congress that military excesses must be capped and that the nation’s civil rights, education, and transportation needed urgent attention.” It is curious that Democrats, the usual advocates of butter in “guns vs. butter” debates, would require persuasion by a Republican president to cut military spending in favor of more spending on education and transportation, not to mention civil rights, generally considered to be a major plank of Democratic platforms.

Eisenhower’s defense budgets did decrease slightly during the course of his two administrations, though not dramatically so, dropping from \$525,341 (in millions of FY 2012 constant dollars) to \$382,745, the decrease being attributable mainly to the ending of the Korean War and a return to a peacetime military. (When he ran for president in 1960, Democratic Senator John F. Kennedy criticized the Eisenhower administration for allowing a “missile gap” to have been created between the United States and the Soviet Union, to our disadvantage.)

On the domestic front, the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare was formed under [Reorganization Plan No. 1 of 1953](#), three months after Eisenhower assumed office.

While Toedtman applauds Eisenhower’s effort to cap military excesses and dedicate more federal resources to domestic problems, the Constitution is very clear about which areas of government are to be used for which purposes. For example, Congress is given the power to raise and support armies and to provide and maintain a navy. Congress is given the power to declare war, and the president is charged with serving as commander in chief of the Army and Navy of the United States. However, nowhere in the Constitution is authority given to any branch of the federal government to provide health, education, or welfare services. And since the 10th Amendment states that powers not delegated to the United States (federal government) nor prohibited by it to the states are reserved to the states or to the people, then these domestic “butter” areas are the responsibility of the states or private



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individuals, not Washington.

Toedtman then moves on to Eisenhower's farewell address, where we find rhetoric worthy of the greatest fiscal conservatives in our history. Maybe, in his mind, not even Senator Taft would have been so frugal, had he occupied the Oval Office! Ike stated:

As we peer into society's future, we — you and I and our government — must avoid the impulse to love only for today, plundering for our own ease and convenience the precious resources of tomorrow. We cannot mortgage the material assets of our grandchildren without risking the loss also of their spiritual heritage. We want democracy to survive for all generations to come, not to become the insolvent phantom of tomorrow.

Toedtman rightly endorses the principles proclaimed in Eisenhower's speech, lamenting that "we're still spending \$5 for every \$4 we collect in federal taxes. The level of red ink is unsustainable. Let's apply Eisenhower's perspective."

The problem with Toedtman's statement, however, is that not even Eisenhower applied Eisenhower's perspective, with five out of eight of his budgets running into red ink. In contrast, Eisenhower's predecessor, Harry Truman, produced budget surpluses five out of the seven years after he succeeded FDR.

Toedtman then urges Americans to apply the principles of Thomas Jefferson, who stated that we must "avoid encroaching on the right of future generations by burdening them with the debts of the past." However, in Jefferson's presidency, there were only these Cabinet posts: State, Treasury, War, Attorney General, and the Navy. Under his leadership, the federal government spent not a dime on health, education, welfare, human services, transportation, or commerce.

Yet, Toedtman stretches credibility to the limit by stating that Jefferson's message "translates into corralling the debt burden and investing in declining schools and decaying transportation and power systems that we'll need for tomorrow."

In classic liberal-speak, we must curb "excesses" in spending for areas authorized by the Constitution, such as for our national defense, and not spend, but "invest" in areas not so authorized, such as schools and transportation.

Toedtman concludes that Eisenhower "had it right." So Taft, presumably, had it wrong.

Taft once warned: "When you get to taxing twenty-five to thirty percent of the national income, that's about the limit for a free economy." According to the Heritage Foundation's estimates, taxation at all levels of government in the United States in 2012 was 26.9 percent of the GDP.

AARP's preference for Eisenhower (who created a massive new bureaucracy with the creation of HEW) over Taft may not make sense, until we consider that in January 2007, the National Legal and Policy Center (NLPC) published a Special Report documenting taxpayer support for AARP. The study found that federal funding accounted for \$83 million, or about 10 percent, of AARP's then-annual revenue of \$878 million. Who would expect an organization that feeds so ravenously at the public trough to preach keeping government spending to constitutional limits?

AARP was also a leading supporter of ObamaCare, [explaining](#): "AARP supported passage of the Affordable Care Act because the law contains numerous protections that benefit our members, their families and other Americans age 50 and over, for whom the lack of health insurance coverage — or affordable coverage — is a serious challenge."



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In light of the above, AARP's giving advice on how to restore fiscal responsibility to our country makes about as much sense as former Rep. Anthony Weiner giving advice on how to avoid scandal.



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